

**Amendments to the Claims:**

Please cancel claims 44-64 without prejudice.

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Original) A method of preparing a rubber polymer in the absence of carbon black, silica, silica treated carbon black or mixtures thereof, comprising;

combining an organoclay with a rubber polymer to form an organoclay-rubber composition; and

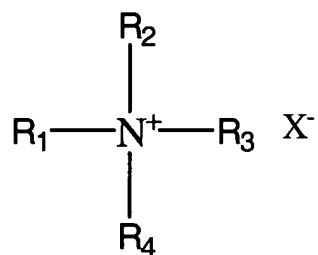
curing the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the organoclay-rubber composition is substantially free of carbon black, silica, silica-treated carbon black or mixtures thereof.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the rubber polymer is nitrile rubber.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay intercalates with the rubber polymer.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises montmorillonite.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises hectorite, saponite, attapulgite, beidellite, stevensite, sauconite, nontronite, Laponite, sepiolite or combinations thereof.
6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein combining the organoclay with the rubber polymer comprises adding an amount of organoclay ranging from about 1 pphr to about 100 pphr to the rubber polymer.
7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises an onium compound.
8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises one or more quaternary ammonium compounds.
9. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises one or more quaternary ammonium compounds of the general formula:



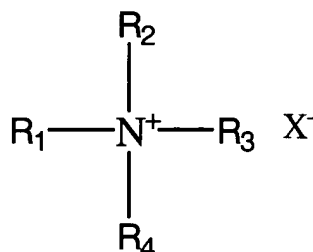
wherein  $R_1$ ,  $R_2$ ,  $R_3$ , and  $R_4$  represent alkyl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 1 to 30, aryl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 7 to 22; arylalkyl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 7 to 22, or combinations thereof; and wherein  $X$  represents a halogen, a nitrite, a nitrate, a sulfate, a methyl sulfate, a hydroxide, a halogenated methyl compound or a  $C_1$  to  $C_{18}$  carboxylate.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the organoclay comprises a multi-charged onium ion.
11. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition.
12. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator comprises stearic acid, palmitic acid, linoleic acid or combinations thereof.
13. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator comprises zinc.
14. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator is zinc stearate.
15. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an accelerator with the organoclay-rubber composition.
16. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an accelerator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the accelerator is mercaptobenzothiazole disulfide.
17. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition.
18. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the vulcanizate is sulfur.

19. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the vulcanizate comprises one or more peroxide compounds.
20. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising combining an activator, an accelerator, a vulcanizate or combinations ~~thereof~~ thereof with the organoclay-rubber composition.
21. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the rubber compound exhibits a modulus of greater than 1800 psi at an elongation percent of about 300.
22. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the rubber compound exhibits a tensile strength of greater than 1000 psi and a modulus greater than 1800 psi at an elongation percent of about 300.
23. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein combining the clay with the rubber polymer occurs at a temperature less than 200 °C.
24. (Original) A method of preparing a rubber compound in the absence of carbon black, silica, silica treated carbon black or mixtures thereof, comprising:
- combining a clay with a rubber polymer to form a clay-rubber composition; and
- combining the clay-rubber composition with an onium ion to form an organoclay-rubber composition; and

curing the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the organoclay-rubber composition is substantially free of carbon black, silica, silica-treated carbon black or mixtures thereof.

25. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the rubber polymer is nitrile rubber.
26. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the clay comprises montmorillonite.
27. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the clay comprises hectorite, saponite, attapulgite, beidellite, stevensite, sauconite, nontronite, Laponite, sepiolite or combinations thereof.
28. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein combining the clay with the rubber polymer comprises adding an amount of clay ranging from about 1 pphr to about 100 pphr to the rubber polymer.
29. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the onium compound comprises one or more quaternary ammonium compounds.
30. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the onium compound comprises one or more quaternary ammonium compounds of the general formula:



wherein R<sub>1</sub>, R<sub>2</sub>, R<sub>3</sub>, and R<sub>4</sub> represent alkyl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 1 to 30, aryl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 7 to 22; arylalkyl groups having an average carbon atom number ranging from 7 to 22, or combinations thereof; and wherein X represents a halogen, a nitrite, a nitrate, a sulfate, a methyl sulfate, a hydroxide, a halogenated methyl compound or a C<sub>1</sub> to C<sub>18</sub> carboxylate.

31. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein the onium compound comprises a multi-charged onium ion.
32. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition.
33. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator comprises stearic acid, palmitic acid, linoleic acid or combinations thereof.
34. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator comprises zinc.
35. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an activator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the activator is zinc stearate.
36. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an accelerator with the organoclay-rubber composition.
37. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an accelerator with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the accelerator is mercaptobenzothiazole disulfide.

38. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition.
39. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the vulcanizate is sulfur.
40. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining a vulcanizate with the organoclay-rubber composition, wherein the vulcanizate comprises one or more peroxide compounds.
41. (Original) The method of claim 24, further comprising combining an activator, an accelerator, a vulcanizate or combinations thereof with the organoclay-rubber composition.
42. (Original) The method of claim 24, wherein combining the clay with the rubber polymer occurs at a temperature less than 200 °C.
43. (Original) A rubber compound substantially free of carbon black, silica, silica treated carbon black or mixtures thereof made by the process, comprising:
- combining an organoclay with a rubber polymer to form a clay-rubber composition; and
- curing the organoclay-nitrile composition, wherein the organoclay-rubber composition is substantially free of carbon black, silica, silica-treated carbon black or mixtures thereof.

Claims 44-64 (Canceled)

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It is believed that no fees are due in connection with the filing of this Preliminary Amendment. However, if any fees are due, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to deduct said fees from Meyertons, Hood, Kivlin, Kowert & Goetzel Deposit Account No. 50-1505/5628-18900/EBM.

Respectfully submitted,



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